[From "Die Männerinsel" pp154-160]

[p. 154]

The Journey to the Island of Men 1915

[p. 154]

"*Knockaloe, Isle of Man, November 1915*"

I wish to present only a few of these stark and stiff lines of poetry composed by an unknown prisoner, who not unwarrantedly considers himself to be the Milton of the 'Island of Men'.

Knockaloe, Hill of Olaf, how much you have seen,
Which since ancient days has betided your valley!
Here Celtic tribes dreamt of many a fairy-tale princess,
Here they crowned *Manannan* their king, son of the sea.

Norseland's rulers, Vikings, came to live with you
And brought new customs and treasures across the sea.
From Ireland came warriors and fought the battle here,
Through which the Norsemen's chiefs became the island lords.

England and Scotland fought to gain the Land of Hills,
But bay and mountains were soon in the Britons' hand.
And since George III staunched the smugglers' trade,
Under England's sceptre has stood the 'Supreme Wise Council'.[i]

In God's Peace rested the tranquil Isle of Man,
And pondered not on enemy's malice of theft and feud.
And the balm of her breezes and the splendour of her coast,
Brought invigoration and strength to pilgrims from many lands.

— Yet now a savage sea of flame surges on the earth
The waves' blaze of death halts peaceful trade,
Sorrow rules over joy. They, bereft of wife and child,
Of house and home, are now *kept captive* here…

Their German zeal they gave freely and joyfully to the stranger,
The zeal the world is well able to praise as an example shining bright.
Now they are made slaves, contrary to all law,
They whose hearts stayed true to the Germanic race.

Knockaloe, Hill of Olaf, you know now the suffering,
Now you know well the misery, the beggar's rags.[p. 155]
The captive sons of Germany dwell in a town
Which has no joy of woman, no children's exultation.

No matter whether the daily acre be tilled in suffering and in pain,
The longing still is for the one great thing, freedom for all the world,

And even if the hands of time point us to midnight,
The free German spirit already senses yet the dawning.

Knockaloe, Hill of Olaf, how much you have seen,
Which since ancient days has betided your valley!

What perhaps the French understand by Devil's Island and the Russians by banishment to Siberia, that place, to the prisoners in Alexandra Palace, is the Isle of Man, in the far-off Irish Sea. Sent to that place were not only all those elements that the English wanted to keep a secure grip on, but also others entered on to the exile lists, men who had made themselves disliked with the German Camp Capt'ns and their committees. Other means were, however, also known for getting oneself taken off again from such a list. The prisoners' corporate body had already developed in such a way that it formed a kind of minor state under English supreme authority, and one not only equipped with the whole apparatus of government and party that makes state-run life so complicated, and for those not exactly 'at the top', so hard to bear. Amongst other things, there were a dozen societies and clubs in competition with each other. In this way for example, the young and competent Munich bandmaster Bohltsmann was first forced out of the Orchestral Society; and then, when he thereafter wanted to set up his own band, was placed on the 'Exiles List'. I, too, was once on it. It was the consequence of my having refused for the second time a suggestion which the Adjutant of the Camp Commandant had made to me in all seriousness in a 'confidential discussion', to wit, that I should come forward for entry into [p. 156] the 'London Scottish', for which I would be released from prison, in order thereafter to fight in Flanders against Germans. My Scottish name was probably behind this offer. Franowitz, who had been born in Trieste, also indignantly refused the offer of fighting on the side of Italy.

Now it was time for us to bid farewell once more, to be transported off into unknown remotenesses. Here, London lay at my feet, its towers greeted me from lovely pre-war days, there lay St. Paul's Cathedral, which I visited with my mother, behind it the Crystal Palace, and even in the Camp we had settled in and made friends. Yes, even the Zeppelin attacks represented another splendid greeting from our far-away homes.

At seven o'clock the signals sounded out, we formed up in three columns in front of the building, several hundred exiles with their pitiful luggage. The rigmarole of being ticked off the list and then being counted in again, as though we were all precious jewels, lasted several hours. The German Camp Capt'n, a dutiful servant of the English, paced up and down in front of us, with many a hate-filled or contemptuous look following him. The ones staying here grinned, or waved from behind the barred monkey-cage windows. Then the old Commandant came in, and walked along the rows. We moved another three metres forward, and were allowed to sit on our luggage, while those needing to go for a break were escorted by soldiers into the latrines. Finally we were joined by Sadi Pasha, the director of the Ottoman Bank in London, in a steel-blue overcoat, with a small suitcase in his hand. We marched to the railway station, where a special train was waiting. Gradually, despite over-crowded compartments, acquaintances did meet up again. Thus in the same compartment I sat next to Sadi Pasha, next to the aforementioned Bandmaster Bohltsmann (who carried his violin as carefully as he would a child in swaddling-clothes), with Schilch, a fat farmer from Canada, with a barber, [p. 157] who had once created a parting in the hair of the King of England, and, *last not least*,[ii] with "Frida", the female impersonator, and his colleague Mandarini. The mood was one of enforced merriment.

The train pulled out of London, with women waving at it from the windows, in the idea that it was a troop train. The corridors were patrolled by Tommies, with fixed bayonets. The Pasha, pondering *kismet*, was smoking long cigarettes, one of which 'Frida', smiling at him, asked to have."There is no harem on the Island of Men", she said, rather tactlessly. But the Pasha understood no German. I opened my tin of biscuits, and everybody dived in. Mandarini, the acrobat, whose name was in reality Gottlieb Rindfleisch, performed card tricks. At everybody's request, Bohltsmann then unwrapped his violin and played to the words of the folksong 'Must I then, must I then?'[iii] Only the face of the 'Caraway Turk',[iv] as the barber cheekily called the Pasha, remained motionless.

"Why have they got *you* in jail?"the farmer boomed across to the barber.

"Was it because you were going to part *His Majesty's* hair with an axe? "*You bettya*!"the hair-artist replied, and everybody laughed. 'Frida' was treated like a lady, she had put on a cloche hat and gave the Pasha a saucy

tickle with an ostrich feather. Every time 'she' had to go out for a break, Rindfleisch shouted "Oh, do be careful!", and the fat farmer tried to take hold of 'her'. "You poofter!" she shouted, and even the soldier grinned, when she walked past him, and threw him a coy kiss.

So the mood was quite tolerable, when at five o'clock we stopped for the first time, in Crewe. The railway platform was sealed off to the public, the same as it would be for a royal special train passing through. When we had traversed the industrial belt, and reached Liverpool at long last, it had begun to grow dark. Released from our long journey, we got out of the train, but a [p. 158] cordon of troops left only a narrow gangway free to reach the quay, where our steamer was lying in wait. How refreshing the sea-air was, and what a beautiful vision this international port offered, with its big, brightly-lit liners and all the many little craft flitting backwards and forwards like fireflies on the water. In contrast to London, Liverpool stood bright and shining in the electric light, with no thought for the 'Zeps'. We had to wait on the pier for the sick and cripples to be got aboard, and the luggage which followed them. We had the deck reserved to ourselves. Then the *Tynewald* made her way out into the Irish Sea, forever hugging the coast, lighthouse by lighthouse.

Breeze from the North West. Before its thrust, the long ridges of waves came dancing towards us, threw somersaults and foamed with a roar into their own troughs. In fantastically improbable shades, the sea shimmered far into the distance, as evening gradually descended. Dark and full of deep secrets, the lonely prison-ship laboured its way by night into the far-way. We were quickly shrouded in by the fog. After an hour-and-a-half we came to a stop. Signals from a lightship warned: "Drift-mines and U-Boats", but the captain was ready to take the risk. All lights were darkened. An icy wind blew across the deck, then a persistent cheerless rain set in, and our limbs slowly stiffened up in the cold and wet. One man leaned sleeping against the next, from hunger and weariness, which were getting the upper hand. The metal body of the ship vibrated in rhythm with the thrusts of the engine's pistons. At five o'clock in the morning, we were still cracking on at full speed. For our breakfast, there was only a cup of tea, at the cost of four pence. In the wild scramble, a lot of the men were already carrying one of these up from below; but all of them immediately got a tremendous stomach-ache, and now tried to storm the small number of 'WCs', offering as much as five shillings to get in them first. Then there was also seasickness to be dealt with, caused by the rolling about of the ship; and on top of that, there was the unrelenting cold drizzle and the foam off the waves, which turned us into long-lost walking skeletons. [p. 159] The female impersonator was the only one tough enough to stay cheerful, he kind-heartedly stroked the Pasha's face, now green.

Endnotes

i Dunbar-Kalckreuth explains (p. 154, fn.1): 'The Isle of Man has its own Parliament, The House of Keys, but an English Governor. The language is Celtic.'

ii Dunbar-Kalckreuth, *last not least* for 'last but not least'.

iii *Muss ich denn* 'Must I then (leave home)?'. The later Elvis Presley song (1961) *Wooden Heart*.

iv 'Caraway Turk' (*Kämmeltürke*): derogatory slang: '˜Turkish person'.

Background

The party would appear to be that of 600 transferred from Alexandra Palace to Camp IV noted in the daily register under 11th October as arriving at 11.30am on 10th October 1915 comprising 272 Germans, 324 Austrians and 4 of other nationalities. The transfer of some 600 by train to Peel must have strained railway facilities - most other groups transiting via Douglas were around 200. The named travelling companions cannot be found as such - possibly the names were mis-remembered or more more likely replaced by pseudonyms as elsewhere, otherwise it seems a strange combination of individuals to have been invented.

Although unnamed the description is of *Liverpool Riverside* station which lay adjacent to the *Princes Floating dock* joined by a bridge - the boat was the IoMSPCo *Tynwald* one of the three passenger ferries left after the Admiralty had requisitioned its larger vessels. He has the vessel landing at the 'mole' which is a

somewhat disparaging description of the smaller Battery pier usually used for freight, well away from any other passengers and which would allow a march down the less frequented South quay to the station (such transfers are confirmed by various newspaper accounts).

Index

Any comments, errors or omissions gratefully received The Editor

© G Newton , 2019